



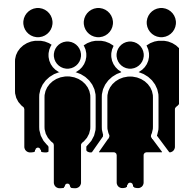
Protecting and Promoting the Health of NFL Players: Legal and Ethical Analysis and Recommendations

Chapter 14

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SUMMARY: **Family Members**



This document is a summary of the full chapter on family members in the Report Protecting and Promoting the Health of NFL Players: Legal and Ethical Analysis and Recommendations. The full chapter includes the following sections: (A) Background; (B) Current Legal Obligations; (C) Current Ethical Codes; (D) Current Practices; (E) Enforcement of Legal and Ethical Obligations; and, (F) Recommendations. Here, we provide our Recommendations, with only the minimum necessary background information. For more information and analysis of the role and responsibilities of family members, including relevant citations, please see the full chapter.

Families can play a crucial role in protecting and promoting player health, including by encouraging players to seek proper medical care and appropriately consider long-term interests; they can offer support through challenging times. Unfortunately, in some cases, family members can also put inappropriate pressure on players or otherwise negatively influence their health. Thus, players' families – spouses, siblings, parents, adult children, and extended relatives – are an important stakeholder whose role we must address. Additionally, friends often play a similar role to that of family members and thus much of what we say in this chapter can also apply to them.

Family members can provide guidance, comfort, love and support. NFL players – given the multitude of issues with which they must deal – certainly benefit from having a caring and supportive family. However, NFL family members sometimes may be the source of problems for players. In 2016, the minimum salary for an NFL player is \$450,000 for a rookie and \$675,000 for a player with at least 3 years' experience. Clearly, NFL players are paid well while playing as compared to the general population. Thus, it should not be surprising that NFL players frequently feel pressure from family members for financial support. Coupled with the short careers of NFL players, it is also not surprising that family pressure can financially ruin current or former professional athletes.

Our interviews with players and contract advisors confirmed that family members play a role – but often a secondary one – in player health decisions. Players, of course, have varying relationships with their families, which dictate how involved a family member might be in advising a player or the player's contract advisor on various matters.

A family member's involvement might also vary depending on the player's point in his career.

When it comes to current players, while they generally discuss their current injuries and health concerns with their partners or other significant family members, they tend to rely most on their contract advisor and the doctors involved (e.g., club and second opinion) to determine the appropriate course of action. Relatedly, it is likely the contract advisor who will handle coordinating the logistics of the care.

Players approaching retirement are particularly likely to consult with their family members concerning their health. The players we interviewed discussed sometimes being “torn” between the desires of their family members that they stop playing and their own desires to keep playing. Family members often see a player when he is at his worst, perhaps even unable to move after a game, practice or particular injury. It is in these moments that family members often encourage players to stop playing for the sake of their future health. Nevertheless, encouragement and convincing are often two very different things.

In interviews, several players, contract advisors and financial advisors also stated that family members sometimes place excessive pressures, particularly financial, on players. In some instances family members might expect or request gifts, jobs or cash. For example, former NFL player Phillip Buchanon claimed that his mother demanded \$1 million from him when he was drafted in 2002.

Additionally, family members might set out to be substantially involved in the player's career, including potentially handling the player's financial matters. These situations can lead to mismanaged finances and broken family relationships.

Recommendations Concerning Family Members

Family members often are and should be one of a player's most trusted allies and confidants in matters concerning their health. In most cases, family members love and care for the players who are their husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, etc. Nevertheless, just as some players are not prepared for an NFL career, the same is sometimes true for family members. Below are recommendations concerning family members that can help improve the ways in which they support players.

Goal 1: To maximize the supportive role of players' family members in protecting and promoting player health.

Recommendations Concerning Family Members – continued

Recommendation 14:1-A: Family members should be cognizant of the gaps in their knowledge concerning the realities of an NFL career, and the NFL and NFLPA should offer programs or materials to help them become better health advocates.

The lives of players and their families are obviously intertwined. A player's career can have meaningful implications for his family members, particularly financially. Nevertheless, despite their best intentions, family members – like most people – might not have an accurate understanding of an NFL player's likely career length and earnings, as well as the physical risks players face in playing the game. Ideally, family members, with the help of the NFL and NFLPA, can understand the tenuous nature of an NFL career and encourage players to think long-term. At the same time, family members should be careful about the pressures they might place on players.

Family members often are more in touch with concerns about the player's life than a contract advisor or financial advisor might be. Consequently, family members can help themselves and players by learning about a player's health situations and understanding what might be done to safeguard them, including but not limited to the player's physical, mental and financial situations.

We do not suggest any formal legal or ethical responsibility on family members to advance player health in these ways, but we do recommend that interested family members be supported with adequate resources. For example, the NFL and NFLPA could provide information and seminars on relevant health issues or support systems and programs for players and families suffering from various conditions.

Goal 2: To separate family members from professional management of players' careers and affairs.

Recommendation 14:2-A: Players should select and rely on professionals rather than family members for managing their business, financial, and legal affairs.

Player financial and legal matters are complicated issues that should be handled by qualified professionals. Even if a player's family member is qualified, it is often best to preserve relationships by avoiding the conflicts that may arise by mixing family and finances. In Chapter 12: Contract Advisors and Chapter 13: Financial Advisors, we make recommendations for improving those industries to ensure that the professionals player do rely on are well-qualified.